

Radical Middle Way Transcripts

Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad on: “The Charity of Love”

An ‘aya’ (verse) has been going around in my head recently, and I’ve been trying to figure out why, it’s a well-known one: ‘corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people’s hands have acquired.’ One meaning of this, I suspect in my own head is the environmental crises. It’s our own silly fault that the air is no longer breathable, that the ice caps are melting, that we spend so much digging up the Earth, turning the Earth into strange and unnecessary things, and then throwing those things away again after a few days or months or years and then burying them back into the Earth again, and living most of our lives in order to earn the money in order to do buy these silly things; that’s ‘fasad’ (corruption), if you like. But there are other sorts of ‘fasad’, and all ‘fasad’ ultimately is to do with the corrosion of the human soul. Allah (swt) has created everything in the Earth to be obedient to Him, except the mysterious disobedience of human beings. As the sons of Adam, peace be upon him, we alone have this capacity for ‘ma’sia’ for disobeying our Lord. ‘We have ennobled the sons of Adam, and we have carried him on the land and the sea.’ We can be above those things; we can be the crown of creation. But similarly we are capable of being ‘the lowest of the low.’ This is the paradox of the human condition; we can rise higher, and we can descend lower than other creature. This has even come true scientifically as it were, we go to the moon, no other living creature can get that high, and we can get right down to the depths of those lowest ocean trenches, where nothing else can live. We can do that in our spirits as well; we can become like angels, but we can become really worse than the ‘shayateen’ (devils). And in our lives we have met people who seem to be of those two extremes. That’s part of the greatness, and part of the tragedy of the human condition, that we operate on such a huge, huge spectrum.

When we look at our history as an ‘Umma’ (Muslim community) and we consider ways in which the unfortunate have been uplifted, by people who hope by engaging in that process, that they will rise somewhere towards the realms of the angels. When we look at the ‘doing of good’ we find overwhelmingly that it is done individually and organisationally by people in certain categories. In classical Islamic civilisation it was the ‘asnaf’ and it was the ‘turuk’ (Sufi orders) overwhelmingly who engaged in looking after orphans. The ‘khaniqa’ the ‘teka’ the ‘zawia’ (Sufi hospices) would be the place where you would bring the foundling, more than the mosque. You could bring the foundling to the mosque and there might be somebody there who would look after it, there might not be. The Imam might be interested, he might not be. But in the ‘teka’, the ‘zawia’ and the ‘khaniqa’ there would always be a ‘jama’a’ (group) there whose pride and honour it was to engage in ‘looking

after the orphans'. And when you look to this day, people that are doing that in practice, including people who don't seem to have a penny to their name. People whose houses are filled with orphans, and I've encountered people blessed with that state, in Indonesia, Africa and elsewhere. You see that they tend to be people whose understanding of religion is always upbeat; people whose hearts met the hearts of others. A kind of luminosity that shines in their faces, that makes people trust them, and therefore they are the ones who tend to get lumbered with difficult cases: the orphans, the widows, the handicapped. They are the ones who have been brought up to this particular high degree. 'Allah (swt) has slaves, has servants, who have been singled out for discharging the needs of others,' and that is a very high degree. These are people who bring 'bishara' (happiness) to others. And this is one of the things that differentiates our civilisation from others. Ours is not the civilisation of the angry, ranting, evangelical preacher, who appears on your T.V screen and makes you feel bad; tells you how guilty you are how sinful you are, and makes you feel so dirty inside so that you have to give to his particular church or charity or organisation. We don't do that. The inculcation of guilt is a traditional Christian preaching method and has nothing to do with the beautiful holiness of Islam.

This is what I have seen amongst the 'Ulama' (scholars) that when they are with those that have the wherewithal to help the poor and the needy, their policy is always one of giving them good news and good tidings and raising their spirit. So that when they give, they do so out of love for Allah (swt) rather than out of guilt. Throughout the 'Umma' I have seen this. Historically we can see what an extraordinary success it was, we have seen whole civilisations that were built on institutions that would engage in taking the least fortunate and raising them up so that they could become and elite. The Ottoman Empire, you could say, was founded on that basis and similarly was the Sultanate of Aceh.

Historically because of the mobility of Islamic cultures, we have been very good at taking in the weakest and knowing that Allah (swt) has given those people the capacities that he has given to anybody and everybody and raising them up. This is one of the unique features of this 'Umma'. How many of the sultans of the Ottoman Empire, of the sultanate of Aceh or anywhere had wives, or mothers from very simple backgrounds who were raised up to be the highest of the high? That is not the case in European civilisation.

So essentially what I'm getting at is that this corruption that has appeared on the land and the sea, and that is creating such misfortune in so many societies, and it seems today, particularly Muslim societies, is something that is not new, but is exacerbated by current environmental crises, by the catastrophes of civil war in places like the Sudan, and in cases of external aggression as is the case in Bosnia, Chechnya, Palestine and too many other places. But the solution, has to be a classical one, the solution has to be the restoration of the quality of people's souls. There have to be individuals whose houses are overflowing with goodness, and therefore which are refuges for the poor and the weak, and the widows, or the orphans and the handicapped. Institutions are wonderful, and we need more and more institutions. Those institutions

are only as good as the people who support them and the people who run them.

The real revolution that is required in the Islamic world today, is an illumination of hearts; a rejection of the stupidity of the endless pursuit of the 'Dunya' that so many of our leaders now seem to be engaged in. How hard it is to persuade them to buy one less racehorse every year, and to give that sixty million pounds to orphans or to the construction of a Madrasa in some needy, pleading place. It has become very difficult, and that is the essential problem. The 'Umma' has tremendous resources, we have perhaps 60% of the world's oil, 75% of the world's natural gas, it now seems with discoveries in Central Asia. Incredible riches, but at the same time extraordinary poverty. The only way of dealing with that, it seems to me, is to live holy lives and to encourage others through the quality of our lives, to think about those who are catastrophically less fortunate than themselves. In other words, the remedy for the current problem is a very ancient remedy: which is that we need to turn within, and we need to create a revolution from within. And then Allah (swt) will start to do extraordinary things for the outward form and the outward institutions and the outward structures of this 'Umma'.

All too often we see fingers pointed in blame at regimes, and sometimes that has to be done. Most of the regimes that rule Muslim societies are pretty appalling. We see blaming fingers pointed at this, that or the other organisation, or group or sect or faction. There is a culture of blame amongst us, but it seems to me that what we need to do, is to take that finger and with the greatest difficulty, because it's the thing that we least like to do, turn it around the 180 degrees until it points at ourselves. Because Allah does not change what it is in people's states 'they have to change what is in themselves.' This is what we need, this is the revolution that has been missing for the last twenty or thirty years, when we have been trying to effect revolutions in so many other areas; revolution in financial services, revolution in Islamic literature, revolution in our theology, revolution in Shari'a, revolution in politics. None of those things seem to have put us in a better situation than we were in thirty or fifty, or even a hundred years ago. The real revolution that is required is the revolution of the heart.

So we ask Allah (swt) to bring us to the people who will bring us to Him. We ask Allah (swt) to give us the great good fortune of being in the company of the 'Awliyah' (Prophets). We ask Allah (swt) to give us the extraordinary blessing and the felicity of keeping the company of people who will remind us of what we are called to be, not people who will constantly remind us of our own dirt and sinfulness. Because there is too much preoccupation with dirt and sinfulness and guilt in the 'Umma' at the moment, and not enough focus on the beauty and the 'rahma' (compassion) and the all-forgiving nature of our Lord, who described Himself in our scripture, as He has not described Himself as far as we can tell in any preceding scripture, as 'the most Merciful the Beneficent and the Merciful'. These are the qualities that melt hearts, and we need to remember and to remind others that that is the Lord that we serve. So I ask Allah (swt) to soften our hearts and to make us those who soften hearts. So that the problems of orphans and the problems of widows and the problems of war and destitution throughout the 'Umma' may, inshallah, be

resolved in the way that Allah (swt) and His Messenger had decreed. God bless you, peace and mercy be upon you.



About Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad

Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad is one of Islam's leading thinkers today. He graduated from Cambridge University with a double-first in Arabic in 1983. He then lived in Cairo for three years, studying Islam under traditional teachers at Al-Azhar, one of the oldest universities in the world. He went on to reside for three years in Jeddah, where he administered a commercial translation office and maintained close contact with Habib Ahmad Mashhur al-Haddad and other ulama from Hadramaut, Yemen.

In 1989, Shaykh Abdal Hakim returned to England and spent two years at the University of London learning Turkish and Farsi. Since 1992 he has been a doctoral student at Oxford University, specializing in the religious life of the early Ottoman Empire. He is currently Secretary of the Muslim Academic Trust (London) and Director of the Sunna Project at the Centre of Middle Eastern Studies at Cambridge University, which issues the first-ever scholarly Arabic editions of the major Hadith collections.

Shaykh Abdal Hakim is the translator of a number of works, including two volumes from Imam al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. He gives *durus* and *halaqas* from time to time and taught the works of Imam al-Ghazali at the Winter 1995 Deen Intensive Program in New Haven, CT. He appears frequently on BBC Radio and writes occasionally for a number of publications, including *The Independent*; *Q-News*, Britain's premier Muslim Magazine; and *Seasons*, the semiacademic journal of Zaytuna Institute.

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